Teacher Development Departmental Chairpersons as Change Agents that can Foster Programmes for Sustainable Development in Universities and Communities.

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I discuss the experiences of Teacher Development chairpersons in their role as change agents that have to foster sustainable development in universities and communities. Challenges observed were institutional support in terms of policy for immediate implementation, funding and empowerment of all stakeholders involved. The paper is grounded in the Transformational leadership theory which seeks to promote leaders who inspire and motivate followers at the same time collaborating with relevant stakeholders for accomplishment of results. The Theory of change also provided a base in terms of change procedure. Furthermore, Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) was employed to understand the role of educational leaders in shaping the cultural and intellectual foundations necessary for sustainable transformation. Mixed research approach was used where both closed and open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data from 8 chairpersons from the Departments of Teacher development in Zimbabwean Universities. Convergent parallel design was adopted wherein both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed separately but concurrently. Findings were that both chairpersons and lecturers needed continuous education, workshops on sustainable change principles and on the other hand continuity through leadership stability was needed. Sustainable development concepts needed to be infused across courses and programmes so as to foster growth awareness. Effective sustainable development in education was also found to depended on strong institutional backing through clear policies, dedicated funding and administrative commitment. In light of the findings above, the study suggests that it is imperative that universities invest in leadership programmes that provide on-going training and support for chairpersons. Furthermore, chairpersons have to work on building partnerships with local communities, other academic departments and international stakeholders for shared learning, innovation and relevance in sustainability in educational programmes.

Keywords: University chairpersons, change agents, sustainable development, teacher education

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sustainable development has become a global priority, with universities playing a crucial role in fostering knowledge, skills, and values that support long-term societal well-being. Within higher education institutions, university chairpersons serve as key decision-makers, influencing policies, curricula, and community engagement initiatives. In Zimbabwe, teacher development chairpersons are uniquely positioned to drive sustainability-oriented programs by shaping teacher education curricula, promoting research, and establishing partnerships with communities. However, their effectiveness as change agents might be influenced by institutional structures, resource availability, and policy frameworks. This study investigates the role of teacher development chairpersons in Zimbabwean universities in promoting sustainable development, highlighting their strategies, challenges, and potential impact on universities and local communities.

Universities and other higher education institutions have been widely recognized as pivotal actors in advancing the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By training skilled graduates and generating knowledge, universities "facilitate social, environmental, and economic development" and serve as incubators of ideas and solutions to global problems (UNESCO IESALC, 2021) UNESCO notes

that higher education plays "a critical role" in achieving the SDGs, not only SDG 4 (quality education) but through research, campus initiatives and community partnerships that address all goals (UNESCO IESALC, 2021) Global initiatives reflect this leadership role: for example, the United Nations' Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) promotes multi-stakeholder collaboration among universities, UN agencies and civil society to share best practices in embedding sustainability on campuses and curricula. (United Nations (2015). In practice, many universities are integrating sustainability into teaching and research, and aligning institutional missions with national SDG targets, reinforcing the sector's responsibility to respond to ecological, social and economic challenges (UNESCO IESALC, 2021).

Leadership and Change Agents

Effective leadership within universities is essential to drive these sustainability agendas. In particular, middle leaders, such as departmental chairs or heads, can serve as influential change agents. Research in higher education shows that department chairs are crucial in impacting departmental climate, conveying expectations, and providing merit assessments, and thus have outsized influence on faculty retention and development. (Gmelch & Buller, 2015) When chairs are trained and empowered, they can align departmental priorities with institutional goals. Similarly, studies of sustainability education in schools and universities highlight that middle leaders can facilitate collaborative practices: for example, dedicated ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) facilitators acted as liaisons between school administrators and teachers, fostering dialogue and professional learning around sustainability. (Hargreaves, 2005; Mogren, Gericke, & Scherp, 2019). In this middle position they worked "to lead improvement processes towards ESD," balancing student learning goals with guidance for colleagues (Mogren et al., 2019). By analogy, Teacher Development Department chairs in universities, who bridge faculty and administration, are well-placed to champion sustainability. They can revise curricula, organize faculty workshops, and promote community-engaged projects that integrate SDG principles. Indeed, higher education leadership programs and UNESCO guidance increasingly target this level of leadership, recognizing that advancing a campus-wide sustainability culture often depends on proactive department-level leadership (UNESCO, 2020).

Zimbabwe's Higher Education and Sustainability Agenda

Zimbabwe's national development policies reflect strong support for education as a driver of sustainable development. For example, Vision 2030 explicitly sets the country's goal of becoming a "knowledge-based economy" by 2030 (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018). The Vision's pillars include expanding science and technology, improving tertiary institutions, and raising overall education quality, factors that implicitly underpin growth and social cohesion (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018). Supporting this, the National Development Strategy 1 (2021–2025), the first medium-term plan toward Vision 2030, highlights education and skills training as keys to poverty reduction and economic advancement (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2020). President Mnangagwa has emphasized that NDS1 "recognises the role of education towards lifting many people out of poverty into prosperity" and commits to curricula focused on science, technology and innovation (All Africa, 2021). Importantly, the government has aligned these plans with the SDGs: the UN 2021 Voluntary National Review notes that Vision 2030 and NDS1 "mainstreamed the Global 2030 Agenda" through a national SDG implementation framework (UN Zimbabwe, 2021).

1. Vision 2030 aims to transform Zimbabwe into an upper-middle-income, knowledge-based economy by 2030. It stresses the exploitation of human capital and innovation to drive economic growth and social transformation (Government of Zimbabwe, 2018).

2. National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1, 2021–2025) as a five-year implementation plan for Vision 2030 identifies education and skills development as top priorities. President Mnangagwa stated that NDS1 prioritizes producing a skilled workforce to drive national growth (All Africa, 2021). Earlier policy frameworks such as ZIMASSET and the Transitional Stabilisation Programme have also been aligned with the SDGs (UN Zimbabwe, 2021).

3. The Zimbabwe Education Policies and SDGs influence Zimbabwe's education reform efforts in reflecting sustainability goals. In 2015, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education introduced a

Competence-Based Curriculum which included competencies linked to the 17 SDGs (Mpofu & Mushayikwa, 2021). This reform laid a foundation for embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD**)** in pre-service teacher education, consistent with SDG Target 4.7 on sustainable knowledge and values.

Despite these ambitions, Zimbabwean higher education has been noted to face implementation challenges. Funding constraints and brain drain have strained university operations, while infrastructural and coordination issues remain to be noted challenges (Mpofu & Mushayikwa, 2021). For instance, the curriculum reforms were initially developed without sufficient involvement from the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, leading to misalignment between school curricula and university teacher training (Mpofu & Mushayikwa, 2021). ESD-specific strategies are limited: Zimbabwe's higher education strategy, Education 5.0, while progressive in its innovation goals, does not yet explicitly incorporate sustainability frameworks (Mpofu & Mushayikwa, 2021). Nonetheless, these national strategies offer important opportunities. Universities can align with Vision 2030 and NDS1 to access government and donor support for sustainability initiatives. Aligning institutional strategies with the SDGs can also attract international collaboration through bodies such as UNESCO, UNDP, or the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI). Recent SDG localization studies in Zimbabwean universities show that while resources and indicators remain limited, awareness of climate, health, and equity issues is growing among students and faculty (Chikodzi & Chigora, 2021). This presents an opportunity for departmental leaders to develop localized programmes, such as those focused on community disaster resilience or sustainable agriculture, that support national development goals while advancing sustainability in higher education.

Furthermore, Zimbabwe introduced Heritage-Based Curriculum, as part of the broader Competence-Based Curriculum reforms in 2015, and this emphasizes the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, national identity, and cultural values into the education system. Rooted in the philosophy of *"Ubuntu"* and the belief that education should reflect a people's history, environment, and aspirations, the curriculum aims to empower learners through a contextualized and locally relevant framework. It promotes critical thinking, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving, while drawing on Zimbabwe's cultural and historical heritage as a foundation for modern learning. The curriculum also aligns with sustainable development by encouraging respect for the environment, traditional resource management, and community engagement; elements consistent with global ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) goals (Maphosa & Ndamba, 2020).

Development Departments and Sustainability Education Teacher

Departmental units focused on teacher education play a critical role in preparing future educators to advance sustainability in schools and communities. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is explicitly embedded in the SDGs: Target 4.7 aims that by 2030 "all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development" (Sustainability Teachers, 2021). Teacher Development Departments (often housed in Faculties of Education) must therefore include ESD principles in their curricula and training. In Zimbabwe, the integration of SDG-related competences into the 2015 curriculum reform provides a platform: teacher trainees are expected to learn about gender equality, environmental stewardship and global citizenship as part of their professional studies (Sustainability Teachers, 2021).

However, gaps remain. A policy review found that ESD integration in Zimbabwe's teacher education has been uneven. Workshops identified "severe challenges" in implementing the Competence Based Curriculum for teacher training, largely because of weak coordination between school and higher education ministries (Sustainability Teachers, 2021). There is also no standalone ESD policy at the tertiary level: the current university framework (Education 5.0) lacks explicit links to sustainability (Sustainability Teachers, 2021). On the positive side, stakeholders have noted that the elements of Education 5.0; notably "community service," "innovation," and "teaching", offer natural entry points for embedding sustainability learning (Sustainability Teachers, 2021). This means Teacher Development chairs could reinterpret existing mandates (such as community outreach projects or research on local problems) in light of the SDGs.

As change agents, Teacher Development Department chairs can influence both curriculum and culture. They lead faculty who train the next generation of teachers, so by prioritizing ESD they create ripple effects: student-teachers learn about sustainable practices and will carry those to schools across Zimbabwe. Department chairs

can initiate professional development workshops on ESD, encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration (e.g. linking science, social studies and pedagogy around sustainability themes), and partner with local communities on sustainability projects. Research shows that middle leaders who facilitate dialogue and collaboration among staff can embed new ideas more effectively (Mogren et al., 2019). Similarly, if Teacher Development chairs champion SDG-relevant course content, they help translate Vision 2030 and NDS1 goals into tangible educator competencies. In sum, empowering Teacher Development chairs – through training, resources and policy support is likely to strengthen Zimbabwe's capacity to use education as a driver of sustainable development.

Intended Outcomes

The study aims to:

1. Identify Strategies; Examine how university chairpersons integrate sustainability into teacher education programs and institutional policies.

2. Assess Challenges; Highlight the barriers chairpersons face in fostering sustainability, such as resource constraints, resistance to change, and policy gaps.

3. Evaluate Impact; Determine the extent to which these initiatives influence both university teaching practices and community development.

4. Provide Recommendations; Suggest strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of university chairpersons as sustainability change agents, including capacity-building programs, policy reforms, and strengthened university-community partnerships.

By shedding light on the role of chairpersons in driving sustainability, this study contributes to broader discussions on leadership in higher education and sustainable development in African universities.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three complementary theoretical perspectives: Transformational Leadership Theory, Theory of Change, and Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory. Together, these frameworks offer a multidimensional understanding of how Teacher Development Departmental Chairpersons can act as change agents in fostering sustainable development within universities and their surrounding communities.

Transformational Leadership Theory, as proposed by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and further developed by Bernard Bass (1985), emphasizes the role of leaders in inspiring and motivating followers to achieve beyond expectations, fostering an environment of innovation and growth. In the context of departmental chairpersons, this theory suggests that their leadership can influence faculty, students, and institutional practices by instilling a shared vision of sustainability and guiding the academic community toward achieving long-term, sustainable goals. The Theory of Change, introduced by Carol Weiss (1995), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how change occurs, outlining the necessary steps and conditions for achieving desired outcomes. By applying this theory, the study examines how chairpersons, through their leadership actions and strategic planning, can initiate and manage programs that promote sustainable development both within universities and in the broader community.

To complement the above, Pierre Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986) is employed to understand the role of educational leaders in shaping the cultural and intellectual foundations necessary for sustainable transformation. Bourdieu identifies cultural capital in three forms; embodied (personal dispositions and knowledge), objectified (cultural goods), and institutionalized (educational qualifications). Departmental chairpersons, by virtue of their academic authority and leadership roles, hold and transmit valuable cultural capital within universities. They influence curriculum design, pedagogical practices, and the integration of sustainability into academic culture. By cultivating sustainability literacy, promoting critical thinking, and

fostering environmental and social responsibility among students and staff, chairpersons leverage their cultural capital to shape values and behaviours consistent with sustainable development.

The inclusion of Cultural Capital Theory enriches the analytical framework by recognizing that change is not only structural or strategic but also deeply cultural and symbolic. It highlights how chairpersons, through their positions of influence, contribute to the development of a sustainability-oriented institutional culture that endures beyond individual projects or leadership tenures.

In combination, these three theories provide a robust foundation for examining the multifaceted roles of departmental chairpersons as change agents. They allow for an exploration of how leadership practices (Transformational Leadership), strategic interventions (Theory of Change), and cultural influence (Cultural Capital Theory) intersect to foster sustainable development in higher education and community contexts.
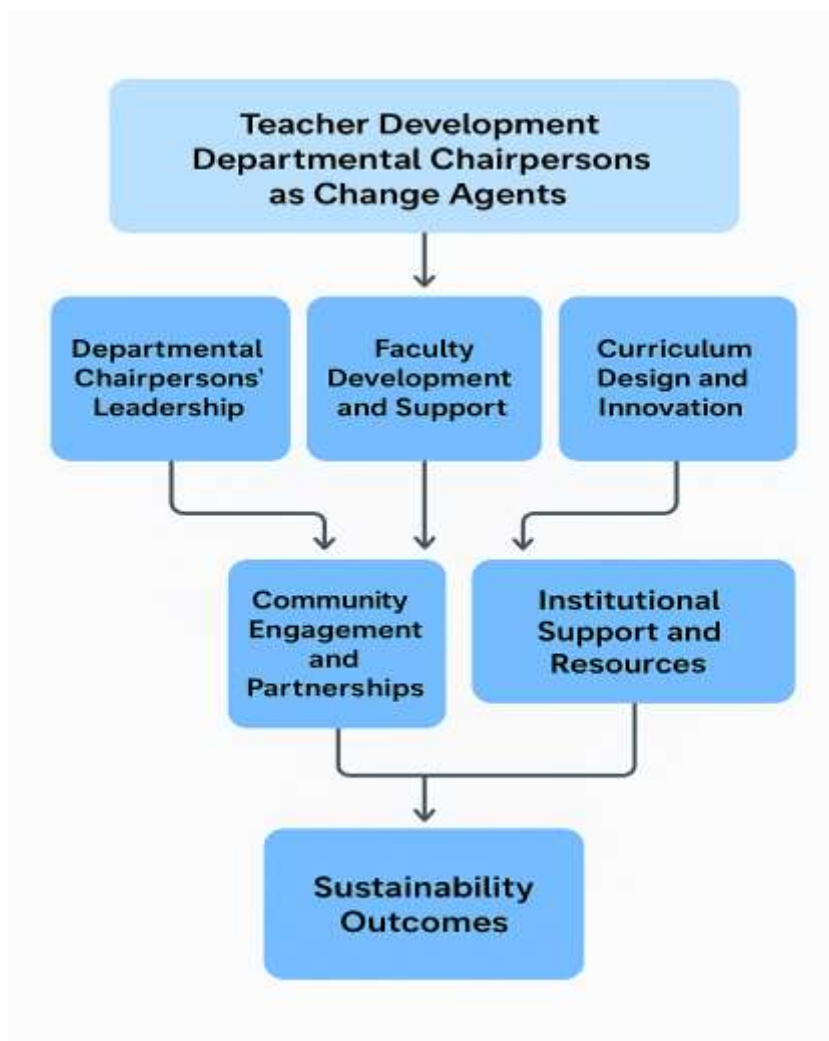
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 Hadebe (2025)

Integrating Sustainability into Teacher Education Programmes and Institutional Policies

University chairpersons play a crucial role in embedding sustainability principles into teacher education programmes and institutional policies. According to Albareda-Tiana et al. (2019), leadership commitment is essential for integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into curriculum frameworks. Chairpersons drive this process by encouraging curriculum redesign that aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education). They initiate workshops, support interdisciplinary approaches, and prioritize sustainability competencies such as critical thinking, systems thinking, and future-oriented learning among teacher trainees (Wiek, Withycombe, & Redman, 2011).

Institutional policies also reflect this integration through the development of sustainability strategies and the revision of mission statements to highlight environmental and social responsibility (Lozano et al., 2013). Chairpersons often collaborate with stakeholders, including faculty members and students, to embed sustainable practices into the daily operations of the university. For example, they may support green campus initiatives, ethical resource management, and socially inclusive policies, ensuring that sustainability becomes an embedded institutional value rather than a separate agenda (Sterling, 2010).

Moreover, chairpersons champion professional development programmes that equip educators with knowledge and pedagogies for sustainability (Mochizuki & Fadeeva, 2010). They promote research opportunities focused on sustainable education and encourage partnerships with community organizations to provide authentic, sustainability-related field experiences for teacher candidates. Through these efforts, sustainability becomes both a content area and a pedagogical approach within teacher education, fostering graduates who are capable of leading sustainability efforts in their future schools and communities.

How sustainability initiatives in teacher education influence university teaching practices and community development, with a focus on the Zimbabwean context:

Sustainability initiatives in teacher education programmes have begun to significantly influence university teaching practices in Zimbabwe. By embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into the curriculum, universities are shifting from traditional, content-heavy teaching to more interactive, learner-centred approaches that encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and action-oriented learning. According to Chikunda and Mahachi (2020), this transformation helps future teachers acquire competencies that allow them to address complex socio-environmental challenges both inside and outside the classroom. Innovative pedagogies such as inquiry-based learning, experiential projects, and interdisciplinary collaboration are becoming more prominent as departments respond to the call for education that equips students with tools for sustainability.

Furthermore, these initiatives have encouraged integration of local knowledge and community realities into teaching practices. University educators are increasingly involving students in community-based projects that focus on real-life issues such as climate adaptation, food security, and water conservation. This not only enhances the relevance of university education but also strengthens ties between institutions and their surrounding communities. Maphosa (2019) highlights that such practical engagement prepares future educators to become agents of change in their communities, fostering a sense of responsibility and leadership among graduates.

On a broader scale, sustainability initiatives contribute to community development by promoting participatory models that empower local people. For example, university-led sustainability programmes often involve community members in collaborative research, school gardening, clean energy workshops, and environmental awareness campaigns. These partnerships encourage knowledge sharing and capacity building, aligning with Zimbabwe's vision for inclusive development. As Zinyeka (2021) observes, when teacher trainees engage with communities in sustainability projects, they help foster locally driven solutions to pressing development challenges, such as waste management and drought resilience.

In addition, these initiatives often influence policy dialogue and grassroots advocacy. Through collaboration between universities, civil society, and government institutions, teacher education departments can act as knowledge hubs that inform and shape sustainable development policies. The ripple effect of this is seen not only in curriculum reforms but also in improved community practices regarding environmental stewardship, health, and education access. Ultimately, sustainability initiatives serve as a bridge between academic theory and practical community transformation, fostering a culture of lifelong learning, resilience, and social equity.

Barriers faced by teacher development chairpersons in fostering sustainability initiatives in Zimbabwean universities

Chairpersons of teacher development departments in Zimbabwean universities face multiple barriers in promoting sustainability initiatives within their programmes. A major challenge is the limited institutional capacity and funding. Many public universities operate under financial constraints that restrict investment in

sustainability-focused projects, curriculum reform, or professional development. According to Chikunda and Mahachi (2020), budgetary limitations have hindered the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in teacher training institutions across Zimbabwe, making it difficult for chairpersons to acquire resources such as training materials, ICT infrastructure, or to support field-based sustainability learning.

Another significant barrier is the lack of trained personnel and expertise in ESD. Chairpersons often find themselves working with lecturers who have limited exposure to sustainability education, making integration into existing teacher education curricula a complex task. Mudzengi (2014) points out that most lecturers were not trained in sustainability-related content and pedagogies, resulting in low confidence and resistance to change. This knowledge gap affects the ability of departments to mainstream sustainability in a meaningful and transformative way.

Policy misalignment and top-down governance structures further complicate efforts to institutionalize sustainability. Although Zimbabwe is a signatory to global frameworks such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is often a disconnect between national education policies and university-level implementation (Maphosa, 2019). Chairpersons may face difficulty aligning ESD with the rigid and exam-oriented curricula sanctioned by national higher education authorities, limiting room for innovation or interdisciplinary learning.

The lack of stakeholder collaboration and weak interdepartmental coordination also undermines sustainability initiatives. ESD requires a holistic approach involving multiple faculties and community partners, yet institutional silos are prevalent in Zimbabwean universities. This makes it hard for chairpersons to foster partnerships that could support hands-on sustainability projects, such as environmental conservation programs, school gardening, or climate change awareness campaigns.

Lastly, technological and infrastructural barriers play a role. With ongoing issues like unreliable internet connectivity, limited access to digital learning platforms, and power outages, chairpersons struggle to adopt modern sustainability tools or facilitate blended learning approaches that support ESD (Zinyeka, 2021). These limitations are particularly severe in rural or satellite campuses, exacerbating inequalities and hindering inclusive sustainability education.

Strategies for Enhancing the Effectiveness of University Teacher Education: Chairpersons as Sustainability Change Agents

University chairpersons globally are increasingly recognized as crucial change agents for embedding sustainability into teacher education programmes. A key strategy is to strengthen leadership training and capacity building among chairpersons themselves. As Sterling (2010) highlights, sustainable education leadership requires deep systems thinking, strategic visioning, and the ability to inspire cultural transformation within institutions. Globally, universities are enhancing the effectiveness of teacher education by offering leadership workshops, sustainability literacy programmes, and collaborative platforms where chairpersons can share best practices in integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) across disciplines.

Another important strategy is to embed sustainability across the teacher education curriculum rather than confining it to specialized courses. Chairpersons can lead curriculum audits to identify opportunities for integrating sustainability principles, such as critical thinking, global citizenship, and social justice into all aspects of teacher preparation. According to Mochizuki and Fadeeva (2010), interdisciplinary approaches and problem-based learning methods are particularly effective. Internationally, universities like the University of Gothenburg in Sweden have shown success by embedding sustainability outcomes into all teacher education competencies, ensuring that sustainability becomes a "whole programme" responsibility rather than an isolated initiative.

In Zimbabwe, chairpersons play a pivotal role given the national focus on Education 5.0, which emphasizes teaching, research, community engagement, innovation, and industrialization. To enhance teacher education effectiveness, Zimbabwean universities are increasingly adopting community-engaged learning strategies. For instance, chairpersons can initiate partnerships with local schools, environmental agencies, and rural

development projects to offer students real-world sustainability experiences. Programmes like the Community Engagement through Science and Indigenous Knowledge (CESIK) at Midlands State University have demonstrated how linking indigenous knowledge with sustainability practices can enrich teacher training while simultaneously empowering communities.

Creating sustainability innovation hubs and resource centres within universities is another emerging strategy. Globally, universities are establishing ESD hubs where educators, students, and researchers collaborate on projects related to environmental conservation, social equity, and economic resilience. In Zimbabwe, expanding initiatives such as the University of Zimbabwe's Innovation Hub to include sustainability-focused teacher education projects would significantly strengthen future teachers' competencies.

Lastly, policy advocacy and institutional alignment are critical. Chairpersons must actively engage in policy development at both university and national levels to ensure that sustainability education is a core mandate. Maphosa (2019) argues that in Zimbabwe, aligning university operations, funding mechanisms, and assessment strategies with sustainability goals will support a more enabling environment for transformative teacher education. Globally, networks such as the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) provide platforms for such advocacy, and Zimbabwean chairpersons could benefit from participating more actively in such alliances.

Through visionary leadership, strategic partnerships, curriculum innovation, and policy engagement, university chairpersons—both globally and in Zimbabwe—can enhance the effectiveness of teacher education and prepare future educators who are truly equipped to drive sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods research approach, focusing on selected universities in Zimbabwe to explore the role of Teacher Development Departmental Chairpersons as change agents in fostering programmes for sustainable development. Mixed methods research enabled a comprehensive exploration of complex social phenomena by integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for the triangulation of findings and a more robust understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A convergent parallel design was adopted, wherein qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed separately but concurrently, and the results were integrated during the interpretation phase. This design is appropriate for identifying consistencies and discrepancies between different types of data, enhancing the credibility and validity of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data collection included questionnaires with both closed- and open-ended questions, document analysis of university policies and curricula, and observations of sustainability-oriented programmes within both universities and their surrounding communities. Closed-ended questions provided measurable data for statistical analysis, while open-ended questions allowed for nuanced insights into participants' experiences and perceptions (Patton, 2015). Document analysis offered contextual and policy-level understanding, and observational data help capture real-time practices and implementation dynamics in sustainability initiatives. Thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed to analyze qualitative data from open-ended responses, document reviews, and field observations. This method allowed for the identification of recurring patterns, key themes, and emergent issues related to the implementation of sustainability programmes.

Four universities, out of the thirteen state universities, were conveniently selected for the study. Participants were then selected using purposive sampling and eight chairpersons from teacher education departments in the four Zimbabwean state universities were selected. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional review boards. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, and informed consent was obtained from all involved. Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained to uphold research ethics and ensure the integrity of data collection and reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The results were presented in themes as derived from the research questions and these are discussed below.

Number of years as chairperson

The data collected indicated that the majority of respondents (63%) have served as chairpersons of the Teacher Development Department for 1–3 years, while 38% have served for less than one year. Notably, there were no respondents with experience exceeding three years. This distribution suggested that the department's leadership is relatively new and possibly undergoing transitions or experiencing high turnover. The absence of long-serving chairpersons could imply limited institutional memory and experience in leadership roles, which may affect the consistency and long-term planning of departmental activities. These findings highlighted the potential need for targeted leadership development programs, mentorship opportunities, and succession planning to build capacity and ensure continuity in the department's leadership.

Academic qualifications of chairpersons

The data revealed that the majority of respondents held advanced academic qualifications, with an equal number (3) possessing either a Master's Degree or a Doctorate (PhD/DPhil). This suggests a highly educated group, with over 85% (6 out of 8 respondents) having postgraduate qualifications. Only 2 respondents hold a Bachelor's Degree, and none fell under the "Other" category, indicating a traditional academic trajectory among the participants. The absence of alternative qualifications could also suggest a strong preference or requirement for formal academic paths within the context of this group. Overall, the results reflected a well-qualified population with a significant leaning toward higher education although studies by Mudzengi (2014) point out that most leaders although academically sound, were not trained in sustainable development content.

Sustainable Development Goals considered to be most vital for integration into Teacher Development programmes

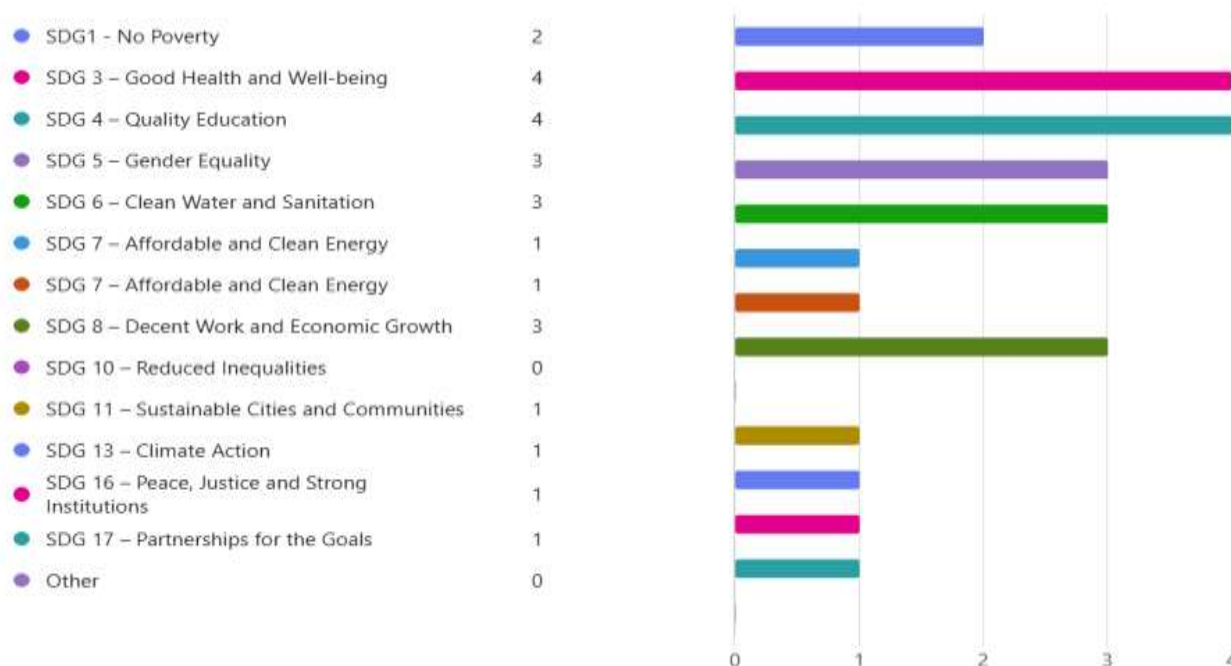| SDG	Votes
SDG1 - No Poverty	2
SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being	4
SDG 4 – Quality Education	4
SDG 5 – Gender Equality	3
SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation	3
SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy	1
SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy	1
SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth	3
SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities	0
SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities	1
SDG 13 – Climate Action	1
SDG 16 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	1
SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals	1
Other	0

Fig 4.1 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) considered most vital for integration into Teacher Development programmes at your institution *(*You may select up to 3 options.)

The analysis of the responses revealed that the most vital Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified for integration into Teacher Development programmes were SDG 4 – Quality Education and SDG 3 – Good Health and Well-being, each receiving 4 votes. These priorities reflected a strong emphasis on improving educational standards and ensuring the well-being of both teachers and learners; fundamental elements for effective teaching and learning. SDG 5 – Gender Equality, SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation, and SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth each received 3 votes, indicating recognition of the importance of equitable and safe environments, as well as economic empowerment in the education sector. Notably, SDG 1 – No Poverty and

SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy were considered by only 2 and 1 respondents respectively, suggesting these could be seen as less immediately relevant to teacher development, or possibly already addressed through broader national policies This could however contradict the government aims of poverty alleviation through Vision 2030 that has a focus on skills development. SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities and "Other" received no selections, possibly indicating limited perceived direct application to teacher development contexts. These responses showed a strong preference for SDGs that directly affect educational quality, health, equity, and working conditions.

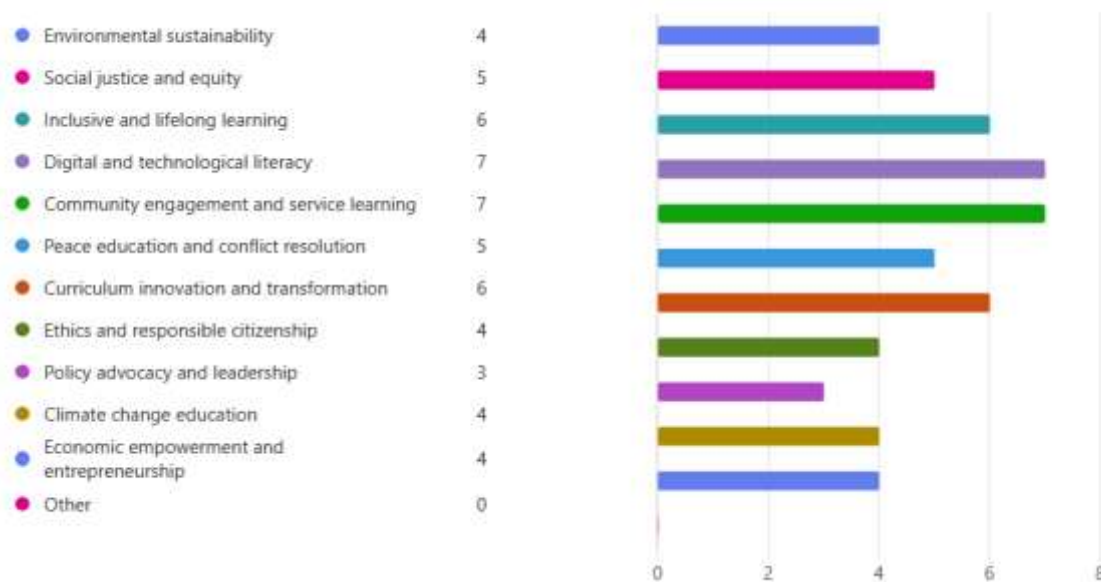**Key themes to be prioritized in teacher education**

Fig 4.2 Key themes to be prioritized in teacher education to foster sustainable development.

(You may select all that apply.)

The results indicated a strong consensus on the importance of Digital and Technological Literacy and Community Engagement and Service Learning, each receiving 7 votes, highlighting the growing need for teachers to be proficient in technology and to actively connect with communities in fostering sustainable development. Inclusive and Lifelong Learning and Curriculum Innovation and Transformation also received high recognition, with 6 votes each, underscoring the importance of adaptable, learner-centered education that spans all stages of life. All the above considerations are in line with NDS1 drives towards producing a skilled workforce for national growth. Themes such as Social Justice and Equity and Peace Education and Conflict Resolution (5 votes each) further emphasized the role of education in promoting fairness, inclusion, and peaceful coexistence. Meanwhile, Environmental Sustainability, Ethics and Responsible Citizenship, Climate Change Education, and Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship each garnered 4 votes, suggesting moderate but significant support for integrating these issues into teacher education. Policy Advocacy and Leadership, with 3 votes, was the least prioritized among the listed themes, possibly reflecting a view that such responsibilities lie more with education administrators and policymakers than classroom lecturers. This might be against the examination curriculum as highlighted by Maphosa (2019) hence creating a need to align these themes with the obtaining curriculum.

The chairperson as a change agent

The responses indicated that the majority of participants (50%) viewed themselves as change agents to a great extent, suggesting a strong sense of agency and commitment to driving positive transformation within their institutions and communities. This reflects a promising foundation for implementing sustainable development initiatives through teacher education. 25% respondents saw themselves as change agents to a moderate extent, indicating some engagement, though possibly constrained by institutional or contextual limitations. Meanwhile, 13% identified with "not at all" and "to a small extent," pointing to potential barriers such as lack of

empowerment, support, or resources. While the dominant view was optimistic and action-oriented, the presence of less engaged individuals highlighted the need for institutional support, capacity-building, and inclusive leadership strategies to empower all educators as agents of sustainable change as outlined in the Theory of Change.

Programmes introduced in the teacher education department

The results showed that a significant majority of respondents (75%) had initiated or led programmes related to sustainable development within their departments. This indicated a strong level of engagement and proactive involvement in promoting sustainability at the institutional level with the aim of promoting all the Education 5.0 pillars. Such initiatives likely contribute to building awareness, integrating sustainable practices into teaching, and influencing departmental culture of research that would lead towards innovation and industrialisation. However, 25% indicated 'No', suggesting that while many were active, there were still some who could face challenges such as limited opportunities, lack of support, or uncertainty about how to begin. The absence of responses under "Other" implied clarity in the participants' experiences. Overall, the findings reflected a commendable trend toward leadership in sustainability among educators, though further encouragement and support could help engage the remaining few in line with the transformational leadership theory.

Collaboration with other departments or external partners.

The results revealed that while none of the respondents had never collaborated on sustainability-related initiatives, collaboration was still limited, with 38% reporting rare engagement and 63% indicating occasional involvement. Notably, no participants reported frequent collaboration, which suggested that although there is some level of interdepartmental or external partnership, it is not yet deeply integrated or consistent. This pattern could point to institutional or structural barriers, such as limited time, resources, or established networks for sustained collaboration. The findings highlighted a need to strengthen and formalize partnerships; both within the institution and with external stakeholders like NGOs and community leaders, to enhance the reach, impact, and sustainability of development efforts in education as explained in the Transformational leadership theory.

Specific programme initiatives undertaken to promote ESD in the department

The responses indicated a diverse range of initiatives undertaken by departments to promote Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Several participants highlighted environmental education and awareness as key themes, with efforts such as promoting sustainable practices, climate change mitigation, and monthly clean-up campaigns. Others emphasized community engagement, including encouraging students to participate in research linked to SDGs and interacting with staff and students on issues like biodiversity, poverty reduction, and disaster risk management. Notably, the mention of the Greening Education Partnership suggested involvement in broader, possibly national or institutional efforts. Overall, the responses reflected a commendable commitment to sustainable development, although there is room for strengthening the consistency, clarity, and perhaps institutional support for such initiatives.

Institutional support

A mixed perception of institutional support for implementing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in teacher education was revealed. The majority of respondents viewed their institution as only moderately supportive (38%) or slightly supportive (25%), suggesting that while some efforts could be in place, they might lack consistency, depth, or adequate resourcing. 25% felt that the institution was not supportive at all, which pointed to significant gaps in policy, leadership commitment, or practical implementation frameworks. Only 13% described the institution as very supportive, indicating that strong institutional backing was not yet the norm. These findings suggested a need for more robust, institution-wide strategies and policies that actively prioritize and embed SDG-focused initiatives within teacher education programmes.

Possession of a clear policy on ESD

The results showed that the majority of respondents (63%) reported that their departments did not have a clear

strategy or policy to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into teaching and research. This lack of formal guidance suggested a significant gap in institutional planning and commitment, which might hinder consistent and effective implementation of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Only 38% indicated the presence of a clear strategy, reflecting isolated efforts rather than a widespread, coordinated approach. The absence of structured policies could lead to fragmented or informal integration of SDGs, driven by individual initiative rather than departmental mandates. These findings highlighted the need for departments to develop and adopt comprehensive, well-communicated strategies to ensure that SDG integration becomes a systematic part of both teaching and research activities.

Major challenges in promoting ESD in Teacher Development

The responses highlighted a range of significant challenges in promoting sustainable development within departments. A recurring theme was the lack of awareness and training among staff, which undermined confidence and the ability to effectively teach or advocate for SDGs. Several respondents also pointed to institutional barriers, including low levels of commitment, limited funding, outdated technology, and insufficient resources and infrastructure. More complex challenges included aligning sustainability with organizational priorities, overcoming cultural resistance, and balancing long-term sustainability with short-term economic pressures. Collectively, these issues suggested that while there could be interest in sustainable development, departments often lacked the necessary support systems, strategic guidance, and capacity-building mechanisms to translate intent into meaningful action. Addressing these barriers could require both top-down institutional support and grassroots capacity development through initiated workshops as outlined by Wiek, Withycombe & Redman (2019).

Lecturer readiness for Education for Sustainable Development

Most lecturers and staff were only partially or moderately prepared to teach sustainability topics. While 38% considered their colleagues adequately equipped and 13% viewed them as very well equipped, a combined 50% believed that staff were either not equipped or only partially equipped. This split highlighted a disparity in knowledge and skills related to sustainability education within departments. The findings suggested that although some educators had the necessary competencies, a significant proportion lack sufficient training or confidence to effectively integrate sustainability into their teaching. This underlined the urgent need for targeted professional development, ongoing training, and institutional investment in building the capacity of educators to promote Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) comprehensively (Mudzengi,2014).

Level of community engagement by the departments

A strong majority (75%) of the respondents indicated that their departments had engaged in community-based sustainability projects, demonstrating a commendable level of outreach and practical application of sustainability principles beyond the classroom. This is in line with the campaign to integrate indigenous knowledge systems for national identity and as guided by the spirit of '*Ubuntu*'. This suggested that many departments recognized the importance of linking education with real-world environmental and social challenges, fostering community engagement and experiential learning. However, the 25% who reported no engagement reflect a gap that still exists in fully integrating community-based approaches across all departments. This discrepancy might stem from differences in resources, leadership, or awareness of the value of such initiatives. To ensure broader impact, there is a need to scale successful models, share best practices, and support departments that have yet to become actively involved in community sustainability efforts so as to come up with locally driven solutions (Zinyeka, 2021).

Community based ESD projects

The responses to this question provided specific examples of community-based sustainability projects, confirming that several departments are actively engaged in promoting sustainable development beyond academic settings. Notable nationwide Early Childhood Development (ECD) short courses to the communities, monthly national environmental cleanliness campaigns, and community awareness efforts related to environmental greening awareness were some of the identified initiatives. However, one respondent clearly

stated "No", indicating a lack of involvement in such projects. Overall, the responses demonstrated a strong commitment by most departments to engage communities in sustainability-related activities, with a focus on environmental health, education, and conservation, although some gaps in participation remained. Expanding and coordinating these initiatives could enhance their impact and encourage more inclusive departmental involvement.

Monitoring and evaluation of ESD practices

A mixed level of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices for sustainability-related programmes across departments was revealed. Some respondents cited the use of evaluation instruments, project displays, site visits, inspections, and reports from regional coordinators as mechanisms to assess progress. These practices suggested that a few departments had put in place basic structures to track the implementation and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives. However, a significant concern was raised by the two respondents who reported having no mechanisms at all, and others who gave vague or general responses such as "monitoring and evaluation processes" without elaboration. This pointed to inconsistencies and possible gaps in systematic and institutionalized M&E frameworks. The absence of clear, structured tools and routines in some departments could lead to limited accountability and hinder evidence-based improvements. To enhance effectiveness, departments could consider developing standardized M&E frameworks with SMART indicators, regular reviews, and transparent reporting processes to ensure consistent tracking of sustainability outcomes and support continuous improvement.

Empowering chairpersons

The responses suggested that empowering chairpersons to act as agents of change for sustainable development required a multifaceted approach centered on training, collaboration, and institutional support. Most participants emphasized the importance of practical exposure, such as engaging in programme redesign and using practical samples, as a means of grounding sustainable development (SD) efforts in real-world application. Staff development workshops and training on SD and change management were frequently mentioned, with a focus on aligning efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). There was also a strong call for university-level support through policies, as well as cross-departmental collaboration and networking with stakeholders to foster a shared vision for sustainability. Overall, the responses highlighted that chairpersons needed continuous capacity building, engagement opportunities, and institutional backing to effectively drive sustainable development initiatives. Knowledge of Transformational leadership practices and the steps in a change process were to be taught to chairpersons through the mentioned workshops,

Envisaged strategies for infusing ESD into Teacher Development programmes

The responses indicated a strong consensus on the need for systematic and explicit integration of sustainable development (SD) principles within Teacher Development programmes. Several participants recommended embedding Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) concepts across all modules and making SD content a compulsory and examinable part of the curriculum, including in teaching practice and research projects. The call for a stand-alone SD course further underscored the need for structured learning around sustainability. Additionally, there is a clear emphasis on ongoing professional development through workshops and training sessions for lecturers, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to teach SD. Respondents also highlighted the importance of assessment frameworks to monitor the impact of SD integration, and the need to foster partnerships with local communities and broader networks to contextualize learning. The recommendations advocated for a holistic, curriculum-wide, and collaborative approach to embedding sustainable development in teacher education, with Vision 2030 remaining the guiding principle in Zimbabwe, seeking to transform the country into a middle economy through curriculum change and innovation.

CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis of the results above, several key conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of Techer Development chairpersons in promoting sustainable development within Teacher development programmes and these flow a follows;

1.1. Where there are frequent leadership changes due to a variety of reasons, the end result is disruption of continuity of educational programmes and this hinders implementation of long-term initiatives essential for sustainable development.

1.2. Both chairpersons and lecturers require continuous training, workshops and reskilling opportunities focused on sustainable focused on sustainable development principles, transformational leadership and change management. This ensures that the chairpersons could be knowledgeable and capable to meaningfully imbed SD in their roles.

1.3. Effective integration of sustainable development depends on strong institutional backing through clear policies, dedicated funding and administrative commitment to avoid isolated and inconsistent efforts,

1.4. Sustainable Development should be infused across all components of Teacher Development programmes, from core modules, to assessments and teaching practice. Establishing standalone compulsory ESD courses was widely supported.

1.5. Building partnerships with local communities, other academic departments and where possible international stakeholders fosters shared learning, innovation and relevance in sustainable education.

1.6. Areas such as digital literacy, inclusive and lifelong learning, community engagement and curriculum innovation were seen to be crucial to fostering sustainable development in education.

1.7. Although some institutions used evaluation tools, reports and exhibits, a gap was noted in formal monitoring and evaluation mechanisms hence undermining the efforts to measure the impact and effectiveness of sustainability programmes.

It is, therefore, imperative to invest in leadership development programmes that provide ongoing training and support for chairpersons, Mentorship opportunities and succession planning could also help build a pipeline of prepare leaders, ensuring continuity and stability within the department. By fostering a stable knowledgeable leadership environment, the Teacher Development Department can more effectively serve as an agent of sustainable development, promoting long term educational improvements and organizational resilience

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